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Home Away From Home

Two words, First Day; I didn’t dread my first day of work but it was one for the books. In my case, it was completely rare, I had to impress the kids more than the adults. Wadeview Recreation Park, known to some as a park but to me as a place of growth. I attended Wadeview as a kid but also had the opportunity to work there as a counselor. Located next door to Boone high school, 5 mins away from downtown Orlando, it was the place every kid in that area wanted to go. Wadeview had a large property that consisted of a playground, pool, basketball court, pond, and park. It had all those things but the memories created there were more significant.

My first day of work and job was at Wadeview Park. It was the first day of camp for the kids in the summer in the year 2016, and they were all eager to have fun. I had to wear a dark blue shirt that had the words “STAFF” in all capital letters on the back and the city of Orlando Parks and Recreation on the front. Everyone who worked at Wadeview was considered a staff and had to always have that shirt on with a blue lanyard that had City of Orlando written on it, which was connected to your staff badge. It was mandatory so that the kids and adults in the community, would know who was in charge of the students in the area.

When I walked in the building on my first day with my blue lanyard, shirt, and khakis, I was shocked. Shocked because of how much bigger and larger everything looked compared to when I was younger. I was amazed with the fact that more than 5 years later it rarely changed, I just grew. That day, I came in for the afternoon shift roughly around 12 because I had to go over rules and adjust to my surroundings because other people’s children lives were in my hands. After, I finished going over rules I went into the multi-purpose room where the kids were being held so that the morning and afternoon staffs could switch. When, I entered the room, it was no different from how I left it in 2009. It was big with red and white walls and tiles, a mini brown stage and big open windows. The kids were sitting in rows related to their ages and talking with loud obnoxious voices. It was me and my co-worker Tamika first day on the job. She had cute curly brown hair pulled into a pony tail, glasses and the same outfit as me, we were put to work as soon as we walked into the room. We were told by the head staff Cris to get the kids to quiet down. Mentally, I wasn’t prepared to yell at the kids but my co-worker was scared to say anything so I realized I had to take one for the team.

So, I yelled at the top my lungs,” There shouldn’t be no talking.”

With that being said, the kids were silent and I knew I could get used to that.

Summer 2007, same room, same walls, same tiles also hushed. I was 8 years old on my way of turning 9 in less than 3 months. I walked into the multipurpose room with my friend Alyssa Velez who was Spanish with sandy brown curly hair, and also the same height as me; 4ft 12inches. The room had a stage at the front and a bare red wall that face opposite of it. Rule number one is as soon as you step foot in the multi-purpose room also known as the “MP” room there should be a bubble in your mouth and talking should be stopped. Second rule is to go straight to the back wall and sit until you hear further instructions from your head counselor.

“Red light, Green light or Hide Behind the wall?” Asked Ms. Tammy

Who was my counselor during the afternoon shift.

Everyone yelled,” Hide Behind the wall.”

Hide behind the wall was the game of the summer that year, it was fun and there wasn’t any kid in the room who didn’t want to play that game. There were 8 old raggedy blue gymnastic mats that were folded in the game closest that’s in the “MP” room with small little dodgeballs that were needed to play this game. Ms. Tammy had to set up the game for by placing the mats standing upward in the shape of a “z,” in different spots around the room, while the balls were lined in a straight line on the stage.

She then explains the game,

“The game starts off with two people on the stage with all the balls, your goal is to get to the stage without getting hit by any of the balls. You can use the mat as your protection, and hide behind any of them. If you do get hit by the ball, you are out and officially become a person who targets other people the next round. Also, no head shots and last person standing is the winner.”

Everything in elementary was competition, when I say everything I mean it. I know in my mind I had to win, no doubt about. First round, passes I went to the first gymnastic mat and poked my head out to see if the close was clear before I ran to the other one. I realized every moved I made was crucial and tripping couldn’t happen at all, and mats falling everywhere. I was known for being clumsy and still am today. I was down to the fifth round thinking I was an unstoppable power ranger.

“Agelie you got this, you have to win, Alyssa yelled from the stage.”

I wasn’t a cocky child but getting that far in the game did make me feel as if my head was getting bigger with all the encouragement and excitement from my friends, I felt as if I had no choice at all but to win.

“I got you Alyssa, winning team over here. There is an “I” in team today, I yelled from behind the blue mat.

Last round left, there was only me and one girl left whoever got hit for automatically lost. I ran to the first mat I saw and barely dodging the ball but making it. I slide to the next make almost getting scrapped by the ball but happily missing it instead. My heart was beating so fast, eyes was moving left to right, my legs were anxious to run. I made a dash to the stage but got hit before I could touch it. I got hit first but in Alyssa’s and my eyes I unleashed my power ranger skills and was actually the real winner. Some people aren’t blessed with quick skills and coordination and I knew that from a young age.

But, there are some things in life that have to be taught in order to be practiced and exceled. Swimming was one of those tasks that I had to be taught over an extensive amount of time but perfected. Wadeview was the center where I learned to swim and it was an experience that I will never forget. It tested my belief in myself and my cousin. When you walk out the building there is a pool that goes from 3ft to 12ft in depth. It has shaped as a big rectangle with 6 diving boards that are on the shorter end of the rectangle and lifeguard post at every corner of the pool, you couldn’t miss it. I recall, a time where it was me and my cousin Jonathan who were going to the camp. I was roughly 6 and he was about to turn 7. It was our first time going to a summer camp and our parents wanted to get us out of the house. It was the 5th day of practice in the pool, we went from learning swim strokes to holding to rim of the inner pool and kicking our legs.

“I am scared,” I told Jonathan with quivering lips.

He would always enter so independently without fear. The sun was either shinning or the clouds were out in the morning, during each day of practice. Camp started exactly 7:30 a.m. and your parents had to pick you up at 5:30 p.m. on the dot or they would be fined. I was dropped off at 7:45 with my bright yellow bathing suit under my play clothes. Now to practice 7 in the pool, the day that tested my strength. Half way through the summer, I wasn’t a pro but I was performing better than some of the kids in my class.

“Go and get the red and blue ring on the floor of the pool,” my instructor instructed.

I was used to blowing bubbles and swimming under water, but actually plugging myself surface deep into the 4ft water was a task I never thought I could perform. I went down the first time, overthinking about how many bubbles to blow rather than just go for it. My eyes were on the prize, which were the two red and blue water rings but I panicked.

“Just do Agelie, stop panicking. It’s easy,” Jonathan said with ease

I stood on my tippy toes and plugged down into the water, without thinking or listening to the continuous nagging of my cousin. I remembered to do the constant arm strokes that my instructor told me to do.

“Up, around, and repeat.”

Those are the words that was running through my head before I grabbed both rings and went plowed through the surface of the water gasping for air. Wiping my eyes from the chlorinated water, I looked at my cousin’s and instructor’s face that was smiling from ear to ear

I yelled, “Did you see that, I did it.”

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